

*A short Account of Mr. JOHN PAWSON: in a Letter to the
Rev. Mr. JOHN WESLEY.*

Rev. Sir,

I Was born at *Thorner*, near *Leeds* in *Yorkshire*, in the year 1737. My parents were reputable people, belonging to the Church of England; and, though strangers to the life and power of religion, would not suffer me to run headlong into the vices of the age; but brought me up in the fear of God, and gave me, according to their ability, a good education. My father being in the building business, brought me up in the same way; on which I entered in the fifteenth year of my age.

At this time I was serious, and had no desire to follow the multitude to do evil. I attended the service of the Church constantly, and met in a small society of Church-people, belonging to the High-Church in *Hull*, where I lived with my brother-in-law. Whether these were acquainted with the power of religion, I know not, as I was, at that time, an entire stranger to it myself; yet I did not doubt but all was well with me, and thought if I died, I should certainly be happy with God.

About the year 1755, I fell in company with two persons who talked much concerning the people called Methodists. I had then an hatred against them above all others, supposing them to be a weak and wicked people. I condemned them altogether; and had no desire either to hear them preach or to read any of their writings. But from the account that one of them gave of his wife, who was a Methodist, I began to have a more favourable opinion of them; and thought I should be glad to hear them. Accordingly, I went one evening with an intention to hear; but when I came to the door, I was ashamed to go in, and so walked round the preaching-house, and returned home.

About the year 1756, I began to follow my business at *Harewood-House*, the seat of *Edwin Lascelles*, Esq; here I fell in with a company of very wicked young men; and though I was preserved from following them into gross sin, yet I was now a greater enemy to the Methodists than ever. But about the year 1758, a young woman, who was a Methodist, lent my father two sermons, preached at the Parish Church in *Leeds*, by the late Rev. Mr. *Henry Crooks*, of *Hunslet*. He read them, and recommended them to me. In reading these, I began to see that I was not in a state of salvation. I saw first, that Justification by Faith was the Doctrine of the Church of England; and secondly, that the scripture teaches it as necessary to salvation. I also saw that the Methodists were the people of God, and that they preached no other doctrine than that which I found, even in my prayer book.

I now began to spend my leisure hours in reading such books as treat on that subject; and was astonished that I could not see these things before. In the latter end of June I went to *Otley* to hear a Methodist preach, when I was more surprised than ever. The serious, devout behaviour of the people struck me with a kind of religious awe. The singing greatly delighted me, and the sermon was much blest to my soul. They suffered me to stay the Society-meeting, which I had great cause to bless God for. I returned home full of good resolutions; but little thought what trials were coming upon me. I thought, certainly, none who love me can be offended at my seeking the salvation of my soul: but I soon found my mistake; for those who had formerly been my greatest friends, now became my open enemies. All my relations were exceedingly offended, and threatened me much, if I would not leave this way. My uncle in particular, who before promised to be kind to me, now resolved to leave me nothing, which resolution he made good. My father and mother were exceedingly troubled, supposing me to be totally ruined; and my brothers and sisters were of the same mind: my father threat-
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ened many times to turn me out of doors, and entirely to disown me; but the love he had for me (I being his eldest son) moved him to use every means he could think of, to prevail on me to forsake this despised people, whom he hated above all others: he mourned to see me "run wilfully to my own ruin." My mother also frequently wept much on my account.

This was indeed a time of great trial to me. My father's threatening to disinherit me, did not trouble me at all; but the consideration of the danger their souls were in, distressed me exceedingly. I therefore did not regard what I suffered, so my parents might be brought out of their Egyptian darkness. To this end, I bought the best books I could meet with; some of which my father read, but it seemed to no good purpose.

About this time my brother was awakened, and also my younger sister's husband. My eldest sister and her husband likewise began to have a favourable opinion of this way. This made my father more severe with me, supposing I was the occasion of all this mischief. For the present he prevailed on my brother to hear this preaching no more. However, it was not long before he set out in the way of salvation. My father, when he saw he was so far from gaining ground, that he was continually losing it, grew exceedingly uneasy, and knew not what course to take. However, he now entered upon a new scheme: he began to be mild and gentle, and to use soft words. He told me, I might buy what books I pleased; only I must not go to hear the preaching. I might learn as much, if not more, by reading Mr. Wesley's writings, as by hearing the lay-preachers. He said the Methodists being a people so universally hated, it would ruin my character to go among them.

I now found it hard work to withstand my father's good nature. Accordingly, preaching being one sabbath-day near our house, I could not break through. When it was over, I walked into the garden, and wept bitterly. From thence I went into a solitary place, where no one might see me, and bemoaned

moaned myself before the Lord. O, the anguish I then felt! I was scarcely able to look up. My father soon found me, and took me into the fields to see the grass and corn. But this would afford me no relief: he was greatly troubled on my account, supposing that I should run distracted. We returned home in time to attend the service of the Church; and in the evening, according to our custom, we read in our own house. When I had done reading, my father seemed to approve of what I read. I was glad, and began to speak to him in as mild a manner as I could; but he was soon much offended, and said, "I find thou art now entirely ruined. I have used every means I can think of, but all to no purpose. I rejoiced at thy birth, and I once thought thou wast as hopeful a young man as any in this town; but now I shall have no more comfort in thee, so long as I live. Thy mother and I are now grown old, and thou makest our lives quite miserable: thou wilt bring down our grey hairs with sorrow to the grave: thou intendest to make my house a preaching house, when once my head is laid; but I shall take care it shall never be thine. No; I will leave all I have to the poor of the parish, before the Methodists shall have any thing to do with it."

I was exceedingly affected while he spoke in this manner. He then desired me to promise I would hear this preaching no more. I told him (when I could speak for weeping) that if I could see a sufficient reason, I would make him that promise; but not till then. He replied, "Well, I see thou art quite stupid: I may as well say nothing: the Methodists are the most bewitching people that ever lived; for when once a person hears them, it is impossible to persuade them to return back again." I then left him, and went to bed; but my trouble was very great. I was tempted to think that I was disobedient to my parents; but I clearly saw that I must obey God rather than man; and that I must obey them only, so far as was consistent with his will.

My brother and I now began to take sweet counsel together: and we strove to oblige our parents with all our might; taking particular care that no business was neglected on account of our going to hear the preaching. We frequently prayed together in our bed-chamber, and several times my mother got upon the stairs to hearken: at last she desired to join in prayer with us. Afterwards my father listened upon the stairs, and after some time he also desired to join with us.

The minister of the parish now began to be apprehensive that he should lose my father, and with him the whole family. In order to prevent this, he carefully gathered all the false accusations he could hear of against the people, and brought them to my father. He laboured with all his might, both in public and private, to make them appear detestable: by so doing, he created me much trouble. I told my father that these things were entirely false: but he was so provoked that I thought he would make good his former resolution of quite disowning me. However, I thought I would write to him my whole mind: accordingly, I began by shewing him the wretched state of my soul, and the danger I apprehended to be continually hanging over my head. I then expostulated with him, and asked, "What worse am I in any respect since I heard the Methodists? Am I disobedient to you or my mother in any other thing? Do I neglect any part of business? Must not every one be accountable to God for himself? Doth our law condemn any man before it hears him, and know what he doth? Why then do you condemn the Methodist preachers whom you have never heard? If you will hear them only three times, and then prove from the scripture that they preach contrary thereunto, I will hear them no more." My father read this letter, accepted of the proposals, and accordingly went to hear. He seemed to like the first tolerably well; the second he did not like at all; the third he approved of very much, and went to hear a fourth, which he liked better than all the rest: yet he was not convinced. However, he now began to pray, that the Lord would shew

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him the way of salvation. A little after he went, on a Sunday morning, into the stable, where he thought no-body could hear or see him, and prayed earnestly unto the Lord. Here it was that the light of the Holy Spirit broke in upon him: he now had a clear sight of his sinful and lost condition, and was brought into such distress, that, like David, he roared for the very disquietness of his soul. He was now ashamed and confounded, and could hardly hope for mercy. This was a day of glad tidings to me: a day which I trust I shall thankfully remember so long as I live. I now had liberty to cast in my lot with the people of God, which I immediately did. My father also invited the preachers to his house. Accordingly, he prevented my turning it into a preaching-house (as he had formerly said) by doing it himself. From this time we had preaching in our own house, and all the family (which were eight in number) joined the Society: this was about January 1760.

For some time, though I knew myself to be without God in the world, I was dull and unaffected: and often applied those words to myself,

“ Still every means in vain I try,
 I seek him far and near,
 Where'er I come, constrain'd to cry
 My Saviour is not here.

God is in this, in every place,
 Yet O, how dark and void!
 To me 'tis one great wilderness,
 This earth without my God.

About this time the Lord began to revive his work among us: my father having received the preaching into his house; many of our neighbours came to hear; our Society also increased, which was matter of great joy to me; but it was my continual prayer, that the Lord would take away my heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh. I cried day and night
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unto him, that he would give me a broken and a contrite heart, and it was not long ere he inclined his ear. I went to hear the word at a neighbouring village, when, in the beginning of the service, the power of God came mightily upon *me* and many others. All on a sudden my heart was like melting wax, my soul was distressed above measure. I cried aloud with an exceeding bitter cry; the trouble and anguish of spirit that I laboured under far exceeding all description. The arrows of the Almighty stuck fast in my flesh, and the poison of them drank up my spirits; yet in the height of my distress I could bless the Lord, that he had granted me that which I had so long sought for. I now sought the Lord with my whole heart, and neglected no opportunity of hearing his word, or of waiting upon him in every means of grace; yet many times I did not hear one half of the sermon, my distress being so exceeding great. I had such a clear sight and deep sense of my exceeding sinfulness, that I was humbled in the dust. I daily walked mournfully before the Lord. The things of this world were made quite bitter to me: I could take no delight in any of them, my mind being so occupied with grief for my past sins, and with desire to be delivered from them. My business became a burden to me: I was quite confused, and brought very low; so that any one, who looked on me, might see in my countenance the distress of my mind; for I was on the very brink of despair.

One morning as I walked in the fields, bemoaning myself like *Ephraim* of old, my heart sunk within me like a stone, and I was about to conclude that it was all in vain for me to expect any mercy; but the Lord would not suffer the spirit to fail before him, and the soul which he had made. He revived my drooping heart with that comfortable word, *O tarry thou the Lord's leisure: be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart.* I was now, for a season, enabled both to hope and quietly to wait for the salvation of God.

About this time one of my acquaintance was brought to enjoy a clear sense of the love of God, when he had only heard about three sermons. This utterly confounded me: I could in no wise account for it. I did not consider, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years. I thought he was deceived, and that it was impossible he should be converted so soon; but the next morning the preacher gave public thanks to God on his account. I was then constrained to believe all was well with him. I returned home, and immediately retired into my chamber; but here I had not sufficient opportunity to give vent to my grief: I therefore walked into the barn, where I thought no one could see or hear me. Here I prayed, and wept, and roared aloud, my distress being greater than I was well able to bear: yet I was not quite without hope, but expected, vile as I was, that the Lord would at last be gracious unto me. But I was not so private as I supposed; for I found my brother was in another part of the barn, in as great distress as myself; and my father and mother soon heard our cries, and came to us, and in a little time my eldest sister and her husband. We were now six in number, and all in the same distress. I suppose, if some of the good Christians of the age had either seen or heard us, they would have concluded we were all quite beside ourselves. However, though the children were brought to the birth, there was not strength to bring forth. I continued destitute of comfort, but stedfastly purposed to abide as at the door of mercy.

One Saturday evening I went to a little village to hear preaching; and it being a new place, abundance of people gathered together. The power of God so accompanied the word, that many began to tremble. There was a mighty shaking among the dry bones, and the power of the Lord was not only present to wound, but to heal also: for this night my father found redemption in the blood of Jesus, and the preacher gave public thanks on his account. When I heard that my father had obtained mercy, I was so far from being able to rejoice with him, that my soul sunk as into the belly of hell. I
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heard very little of the sermon, but continued kneeling all the time of service; and after it was ended, I still continued trembling, weeping, and crying aloud for mercy. I returned home as well as I was able; for my bodily strength was quite exhausted. My head was as the waters, and mine eyes became as a fountain of tears. I was truly willing to be saved by grace. I was naked, and stripped of all. I had nothing of my own to depend upon for life and salvation. I had nothing to pay; no money or price to bring with me to procure the favour of God.

I passed this night in sorrow and great heaviness, and was glad when the day returned. It was the Lord's day, and the preacher intended to meet our society, in order to wrestle with God in behalf of those who were in distress. I went with a heart full of sorrow, panting after the Lord as the hart after the water-brooks. The service began, and the power of God was present in a very wonderful manner; when prayer was made in behalf of those who were in distress, I was bowed upon my knees in the middle of the room, and, if possible, was in greater anguish of spirit than ever before. I heard one, whose voice I knew, cry for mercy with all his might, as if he would rend the very heavens. Quickly after, in the twinkling of an eye, all my trouble was gone, my guilt and condemnation were removed, and I was filled with joy unspeakable. I knew, by experience, that the Lord was merciful to my unrighteousness, and remembered my sins no more. The love of God was shed abroad in my heart. I loved him from an experimental sense of his love to me. O how my soul triumphed in the God of my salvation! This glorious deliverance was wrought by his Holy Spirit, applying those words, *Thou art mine*. Some time after, my brother told me the words were in the prophecy of Isaiah: I rose early in the morning and took my bible, which I opened at random, and they were the first words which I cast my eyes upon! Isaiah xliii. 1. This was a kind of renewal of the promise of God to me, and I was enabled to praise him the more.

The day upon which the Lord brought my soul out of prison, was Sunday, the 16th of March 1760, which, I trust, I shall thankfully remember so long as I live. The change passed upon my soul was exceeding great. I was brought out of darkness into marvellous light—out of miserable bondage into glorious liberty—and out of the most bitter distress into unspeakable happiness! I had not the least doubt of my acceptance with God; but was fully assured, that he was reconciled to me through the merits of his Son, who was now unspeakably precious to my soul. I was also fully satisfied, that I was born of God or renewed in the spirit of my mind, and I could heartily praise the Lord that he had taken that severe method in bringing me home to himself. For by this means, my justification was so clear to me, that I could neither doubt nor fear: the work of the Spirit of God, in renewing my soul, was also the more conspicuous: and this caused me to prize the liberty into which I was brought, and made me more afraid of being entangled again with the yoke of bondage. I now walked comfortably with God, enjoying sweet communion with him. I could both *do* and *suffer* his will with all cheerfulness. Yet Satan soon began to assault me, and laboured to perplex me with evil reasoning; telling me, I should not always have so great a value for God or for spiritual things as I now had: but as I was happy for the present, I did not regard all he could say, knowing that I had nothing to do with hereafter. I had only to live by the faith of the Son of God, who now appeared as altogether lovely.

About six weeks after, the preacher proposed dividing our little society into two classes, and desired me to meet one of them. This was a fore trial to me; but when he insisted on my doing it, I was obliged to take up the cross. From the first or second time I met it, I continually walked in the light of God's countenance: no creature shared my affections with God; but I served him with an undivided heart. I had no distressing temptations, but had constant power over all sin; so that I lived as upon the borders of heaven.

About this time my elder sister and my younger sister's husband were brought into the Christian liberty, and a little after, my mother and younger sister. This gave me fresh cause to bless the Lord for his goodness.

December 28, 1760, the Lord spoke peace to my brother, while I was praying with him. Now I had more cause to praise the Lord than before. My brother had laboured for a whole year in fore distress of mind, and was many times brought to the brink of despair. I do not remember to have seen any one in the like circumstances for so long a time. But God broke all his bonds asunder, and caused him to walk in the light of his countenance.

We now began to have a public meeting for prayer every Sunday evening; but had no person among us who could give a word of exhortation. This troubled me much; for I was afraid the people would grow weary of coming together, if we continued only to sing and pray, as they were obliged to stand or kneel all the time. I thought it would be much better to read a sermon to them, that they might sit down a little. Accordingly I got the Homilies of the Church, which were entirely new to the people. These I read, and, as I was able, explained; in doing which I found great liberty. This proved a blessing to many. But the minister of the parish (being an open enemy to all that is good) began to be offended, and laboured to prejudice the people against me. He seemed not to regard what he said either in public or private, if by any means he could turn the people aside. But they did not regard him: nay, the more he said, the worse they liked him; so that when he saw he could prevail nothing, he determined to leave the town, which in a little time he accordingly did. When I had read the most profitable of the Homilies, I took Mr. *Burkett* on the New Testament, and read many particular passages therein, and enlarged where I thought it needful.

After this, I began to take the Bible itself, and, in my poor manner, expounded part of a chapter from time to time; and,

and, notwithstanding my insufficiency, much good was done. But this exposed me to fresh trials : the people from the neighbouring societies began to invite me to go and give them a word of exhortation ; but, as I well knew my own weakness, I absolutely refused. But the assistant prevailed on me to go to a neighbouring town on a Sunday evening. The people, whether I would or not, thrust me into the pulpit. I trembled exceedingly : however, I spoke as well as I could, and the same evening returned home, greatly ashamed of what I had said. I was in hopes they would trouble me no more : but so far was I deceived in this, that, about *Lady-Day* 1762, the assistant employed me among the local preachers. I now knew not what course to take : yet I durst not decline the work. However, I was almost determined to remove into some distant part of the country : but the love I had for the society to which I belonged, would not suffer me. I was, therefore, obliged to do what I could, and I found God was with me.

In *August* following, the Conference was at *Leeds*, and the assistant desiring me to attend, I took up my cross, and went. Several young men were proposed as candidates for travelling preachers, and I among the rest. When you, Sir, asked me if I was willing to give up myself to the work, I told you, I was conscious of my inability, but if you and the brethren thought good to make trial of me, I should deliver up myself to you. Accordingly, I was ordered for the *York* circuit. When I was gone, God raised up my brother to take my place, who was soon as well beloved by the people as I had been. I had till now met a few people in *Harewood*, where I had followed my business. I had suffered much in my mind on their account, as I had no hope of any settled preaching there. As all the town belonged to one gentleman, I thought he would never suffer it ; and as no one could receive the preachers without his consent, my labour would be in vain. The few people here were also much cast down, when they heard I was going to leave them. But after my removal, I was invited to preach
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among them, which I accordingly did, to a multitude who came together : and from that time they have had the gospel preached among them ; and, to the great surprise of many, without any of the opposition they so much expected.

I now entered upon my circuit. Here the assistant behaved to me with all the tenderness of a parent, and the other preachers acted, in their places, in like manner : the people not only bore with my weakness, but seemed glad to see me wherever I came ; and I often found myself unspeakably blest in speaking to them. I desired nothing more than to glorify God with my body and spirit, which I knew he had redeemed. Yet I met with many trials from various quarters. In many places the press-gangs attended our preaching, and threatened what they would do : but the Lord restrained them. In other places we had much persecution, especially in *Beverley*, where the magistrates absolutely refusing to do us justice, we seldom could preach with any degree of satisfaction to ourselves, or those who desired to hear us. When we complained against three young men who disturbed us much, and they were brought before the mayor and aldermen, they said, the information was insufficient, being only signed by myself. The mayor then insisted, that I had been examined upon oath before him, and that having sworn to men that I did not know, he would indict me for perjury, and send me to *York* castle. When they would permit me to speak, I told them, that I was so far from having taken a false oath, that I had taken no oath at all ; that there were now present three very sufficient witnesses, who would all make oath, if it was required, that neither I nor any other person had taken any oath on the occasion. When they heard this, they began to be a little more calm ; but as they were determined to do us no justice, we quietly withdrew. However, the work of God prospered much in those parts this year : many joined the society, and many found redemption in the blood of Jesus.

The next year I and three others were ordered into the *Haworth* circuit. We found the people, in those parts, in a very languishing condition. There seemed an universal mourning for the loss of that eminent servant of God, Mr. *Grimshaw*, who died the year before. Many said, Farewel to all prosperity in these parts; the work of God will come to nothing. But, to our unspeakable comfort, there was a blessed revival: the society was exceedingly quickened and enlarged; and it was thought, there was more good done in this one year, than in four years put together before.

In *August* 1764, I was ordered for *Norwich*. Here the congregations were in general very large, while our society increased considerably. But during the winter, we had almost continual mobbing. The rioters frequently broke the windows, interrupted us in preaching, and abused the people when service was ended. We made complaint to the mayor, but he would not do us justice; which encouraged the rioters, and led them to commit still greater outrages.

I was now removed to *Colchester* for a season, when preaching had just begun in a place about six miles from it. Here they did not treat us in a friendly manner: the mob, being encouraged by the church-wardens, were exceeding violent. They assembled in great numbers before the house, having got a drum and a large quantity of horns, with which they made such a prodigious noise, that the people could not hear. Meantime, the constable and church-wardens came into the house, and asked me, if I would go with them to the quarter-sessions the next day. I told them, I would. They said, Then we need not shew you the justice's order. I then desired our friends to bring my horse. They said, You had better walk to the end of the town. I did so: the mob gave me a free passage, but followed me, beating the drum, sounding their horns, and shouting with all their might. I walked slowly down the street before them, in great peace and tranquillity of mind. When we came to the bridge, at the end of the town, I stopped
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ill my horse came. They now encompassed me on every side, yet none of them struck me, or so much as cast any dirt or stones at me, although I had no man with me. But after I was gone, they abused the poor people who had come from *Colchester* with me very much.

The next day I appeared at the sessions. The principal justice was a clergyman belonging to the cathedral in *Canterbury*, a very candid, sensible gentleman. He said, he would not have me think he had sent for me by way of persecution: but as complaint had been made to him by the church-wardens and others of the inhabitants of *Nayland*, that certain strangers, who acted in the capacity of preachers, had come at unreasonable hours in the night, and made very great disturbance in the town; he, as one of his Majesty's justices of the peace, was obliged to enquire into it, and therefore required me to answer to certain questions drawn up in writing. He read the questions, and I answered them, so that he was quite satisfied, and promised, that we should have peace for the time to come; but hoped we would forgive all that was past.

In a little time I returned to *Norwich*, where I spent the remaining part of the year in great peace. We were obliged to preach in the open air all that summer. We had also a good prospect of a revival of the work of God in *Yarmouth*, having procured a convenient chapel, which had been built for the Anabaptists. We had abundance to hear from time to time, and much good was likely to have been done: but one of our leaders turning Calvinist, sowed such discord among the society, that nothing but confusion followed; the people scattered so effectually, that the wound then given could never be healed.

From hence I went to *Birfal* in *Yorkshire*, and spent a year with much satisfaction; my own soul being frequently comforted, while the work of God in a good measure revived.

The two following years I spent in *Lancashire*. The first of which was exceeding agreeable: only the death of my dear fellow-

fellow-labourer, *Paul Greenwood*, exceedingly affected me. On the one hand, I mightily rejoiced that so dear a servant of God was taken to his reward; and on the other, I mourned bitterly at the loss of so dear a friend. The last year I spent in these parts was a time of great trial on various accounts.

From *Lancashire* I went to *Staffordshire*, and staid only a single year. But I had the satisfaction to see the work of God greatly revive: many new societies were raised, and a considerable number of the old ones were quickened and established.

The two following years I spent in *London*, with some degree of satisfaction, both to myself and others; but cannot say much concerning the success of my labours here.

From *London* I went to *Bristol*, where I continued three years. I have reason to bless God, that my poor labours were acceptable, and, I hope, in some measure, useful to the people.

The four following years I spent about *Leeds* and *Birfal*, in *Yorkshire*. In the latter of these there was a very great revival of religion. Hundreds of sinners were awakened, and turned from the evil of their ways; and many received a comfortable assurance of the favour of God.

From *Yorkshire* I am again returned to *London*. What successes, trials, or comforts I may meet with, I know not; but I am still determined to continue at my Master's feet, that he may fulfil in me all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power.

With regard to the Arminian Controversy, although I have frequently heard the Calvinists preach, and also read many of their writings, yet I never had the least doubt of Christ's tasting death for every man, or of his willingness to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through him.

I am, Rev. Sir, Yours, &c.

JOHN PAWSON.

LETTERS.

